MAINE HEALTH ALERT NETWORK



Maine Department of Health and Human Services
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC)
(Formerly Bureau of Health)
11 State House Station
Augusta, Maine 04333-0011
Phone 1-800-821-5821 / Fax 207-287-7443

**ADVISORY - Important Information **

2009PHADV045

TO: School Nurses, School-Based Health Centers, Border Medical Officers, FQHCs,

ICPs, Physicians, Hospitals, Labs, MEMA, County EMA, NEPCC, Public

Health-Required, PHNs, RRCs

FROM: Dora Anne Mills, M.D., M.P.H., Public Health Director

SUBJECT: Hepatitis A Cluster, Swans Island, ME

DATE: September 4, 2009

TIME: 4:50 pm

PAGES: 2

PRIORITY: High

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Hepatitis A Cluster, Swans Island, Maine – Summer, 2009

Background: The Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC) is continuing to investigate a cluster of acute hepatitis A associated with one household on Swans Island in Hancock County. Currently, nine cases have been identified. There has been one death; one other individual was hospitalized. All cases are among out-of-state residents. The cases are residents of Nebraska, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia. The age range is 13 years to 69 years of age. The onset date of the first case was July 7. The most recent case became ill on September 2. This case prepared food at a potluck dinner on August 22 at a church on the island. Because of the time interval since the potluck, prophylaxis with vaccine or immune globulin is not recommended at this time for persons who attended the dinner.

Hepatitis A is an uncommon disease in Maine. An average of 11 cases are identified in Maine each year. Hepatitis A can result in mild illness in children; many will be asymptomatic. In adults, hepatitis A infection can range in severity from mild to life threatening. Case fatality can reach 1.8% in adults over 50 years of age. Individuals are considered infectious during the latter half of the incubation period and for approximately 1 week after onset of jaundice. The virus is excreted in feces and is transmitted by the fecal-oral route. Good hand washing is key to limiting disease transmission.

Recommendations: Area health care providers are encouraged to consider hepatitis A infection in persons with recent onset of jaundice, fever, anorexia, fatigue, nausea, dark urine, clay colored stools, and abdominal discomfort. Diagnostic testing should include hepatitis A IgM antibody and liver enzymes (AST/ALT). Interpretation of a positive IgM test for HAV is difficult in a recently immunized individual. IgM positive results can occur from either natural infection or immunization. Confirmation of infection in recently immunized individuals is usually dependent on clinical signs and elevated liver enzymes.

All cases of suspected viral hepatitis should be reported immediately by phone to the Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821. Epidemiologists are available to provide guidance on post-exposure prophylaxis with either hepatitis A vaccine or immune globulin. To be effective, post exposure prophylaxis needs to be given as soon as possible, but not later than 14 days after last exposure.

For More Information: Contact Maine CDC at 1-800-821-5821. Information on hepatitis A is available at: http://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/PDF/wk/mm5641.pdf.